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LANDMARKS AT RISK

As this old photograph shows, the Hangman's Building featured a center door with multipaned windows on each side. Along with physical evidence, the photo is part of the documentation that will be used to restore the wood-frame building to its original configuration. Photo: National Historic Landmark files.

Landmark Condition

The one-story log structure, built in 1864, is threatened by severe physical deterioration. Currently vacant, the private owners want to restore the building and as a museum, then open it to the public to interpret a vital part of the city's past; however, there are limited funds available for project work. In addition to replacing deteriorated siding, several later and inappropriate alterations need to be reversed. For example, the facade was altered in the early 20th century when the central entrance was sealed and siding installed over the lower portion of the fixed doors to create a window; the flanking windows were changed into doorways. The interior was also altered when new partition walls were installed to create two separate entrances. The most significant feature of the interior is a heavy wood timber truss at the midpoint of the building, on which ropeburns from the 1864 vigilante hanging are still visible. These should be carefully preserved.

Recommended Work/Costs

Data was taken from a National Park Service report, "National Historic Landmark Condition Assessment Report: "Hangman's Building (Water Company Building), Virginia City Historic District, Virginia City, Montana" by Winter & Associates, Boulder, Colorado. As a result of careful inspection, work areas were prioritized. Topping the list is the purchase and installation of a basic fire detection system for $1,700. Next, not surprisingly, the bulk of project work should be directed to the building's deteriorating and altered exterior. In all, exterior work is estimated in excess of $31,000. Of this amount, over $15,000 is needed for various aspects of preserving the log-frame structure, including replacement of damaged wood siding, repointing of chimneys and replacement of missing bricks, and replacement of deteriorated roofing materials. The foundation also needs to be stabilized to halt lateral movement of the structure. The remainder of high priority exterior work, estimated at $13,000, should be spent to restore the front entrance, including reconstruction of windows and doors to the historic configuration. Another $3,700 in minor exterior work was recommended, mostly involving monitoring of the foundation and walls for further movement and re-glazing windows to prevent further exposure to the weather.

The interior will cost significantly less to repair and restore — all work can be completed for around $20,000. Of this amount $18,600 is considered high priority and is related to removing inauthentic elements such as doors and trim, ceiling, composition board walls, and wallpaper, then undertaking a documented restoration of the historic features and finishes. Some extant features, such as the flooring, simply need to be repaired. Extensive electrical work needs to be accomplished as part of any new use ($6,000). Finally, the site needs to be re-graded to improve drainage ($600).
The architecs detailed assesement is available from National Park Service offices (see **HOW YOU CAN HELP**, over).

This recent photo conveys the existing condition of the structure. Exterior wood surfaces lack protective paint and are dried and cracked. Much of the siding needs to be replaced. Photo: Winter & Associates.

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LANDMARKS AT RISK

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Donate to a Landmark in your area.

First, for information on how you can help the Hangman's Building in Virginia City, Historic District, Montana, contact the following organizations:

National Park Service

Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Division of Cultural Resources
12795 W. Alameda Parkway
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, CO 80225
(303)969-2875

State Historic Preservation Office

Montana Historical Society
225 N. Roberts Street
Helena, MT 59620
(406)444-7715

Local Preservation Group

Montana Preservation Alliance
P.O. Box 291
Butte, MT 59703
(no phone)

Owner Contact

Bruce McCallum, Manager
Bovey Restorations
P.O. Box 338
Virginia City, MT 59775
(406)843-5471

Support the Landmark Fund

Second, you can assist National Historic Landmarks by donating money or building materials through the National Park Foundation, a charitable, non-profit organization chartered by Congress in 1967, in part, to further conservation of historic and educational resources for future generations of Americans by accepting and administering gifts. Among the various activities of the Park Foundation is administration of the National Historic Landmark Fund. This fund has been set up to assist endangered Landmarks nationwide by making possible tax deductible materials and cash donations by individuals, organizations, or companies.

Donations may be used to support threatened Landmarks in general or a Landmark of the donor's choice. Donors may select a Landmark to assist based on its location or associations with specific historic themes, events, or individuals; its architectural style; its building type; or its construction material. Landmarks in need of various services or building products which correspond to a donor's business can also be selected. The National Park Foundation gives priority to those Landmarks in which critical needs have been identified through professional evaluation and planning sponsored by the National Park Service.

For additional information on Landmarks, or to find out how you can help Landmarks at Risk by donating to the National Historic Landmark Fund, please contact:

Landmarks at Risk

Preservation Assistance Division
Attn: NHL Assistance
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, DC 20013-7127
(202)343-9578

Landmarks at Risk are executive summaries of Landmark Condition Assessment Reports undertaken by the National Park Service as part of its technical assistance activities to help and preserve National Historic Landmarks, those resources designated by the Secretary of the Interior as possessing "exceptional value in America's history."

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HANGMAN'S BUILDING
(WATER COMPANY BUILDING)
Virginia City Historic District
Virginia City, Montana

Virginia City is tucked into the foothills of the Tobacco Root Mountains of southwestern Montana where Daylight Gulch joins Alder Gulch. Its importance as a mining town began in 1863, when gold was first discovered. Before the end of that first year all the available claims in the gulch were located and the streets lined with cabins and sluices and camps — a typical boom town constructed of makeshift materials for drifting prospectors. But unlike other mining communities in the area, Virginia City quickly became a major town, then the capital of the territory. More substantial buildings — framed in hewn logs covered with sawed pine siding and characterized by false fronts — were constructed for the estimated 10,000 population. Amount $40,000,000 in gold was mined between 1863-1869.

Predictably, the discovery of gold also drew an aggressively lawless element to the new city. The notorious Plummer gang produced a record of robbery and murder perhaps unequalled by other western outlaw gangs. As a community reaction to the killings, a group of Virginia City citizens formed a "Vigilance Committee," and proceeded to capture, try, and punish five criminal road agents by hanging them from the purlins of the local Water Company Building, known today as the Hangman's Building. The graves of the five outlaws can be seen on "Boot Hill," which overlooks the city. For its exceptional importance in American history, Virginia City Historic District was designated a National Historic Landmark by the Secretary of the Interior in 1961.

Unfortunately, at this date, the Hangman's Building, with its characteristic false front, colorful history, and rope-burned purlins, is jeopardized by serious building deterioration.

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